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GARDEN NOTES

No. 6



Issued by

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Van Wert, Ohio



Last December, after it became known that my daughter Alice and I expected to spend the first five months of the year traveling in the Eastern Mediterranean countries, I received a letter from J. C. Wister, President of the American Iris Society, asking me if we could not arrange to see the Iris Exhibitions in Paris and London, and to attend the meetings of the growers in those cities as representatives of the American Iris Society. In thinking the matter over I made up my mind that if seeing the big Iris Shows was a desirable thing to do, a still better one would be to meet, if possible, each Iris grower in his own garden and see his plants under the most favorable conditions. Accordingly, I began to make my plans so that I could do exactly what Mr. Wister wished, and in addition get the personal touch of acquaintance and friendship of each of the European growers. And so this issue of my Garden Notes, and probably the three or four succeeding ones, will be the result of notes taken in French and English gardens.

Our four months' trip through Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Greece was so enjoyable, and the lectures of our leaders were so valuable in laying a good foundation for Alice's college course, that when in Naples, on May first, I found

an invitation to start at once for the French Gardens, I hesitated to deprive her of a seven weeks' trip through Italy and Switzerland. She had fortunately formed some strong friendships among the ladies traveling with us, and so it was decided to allow her to remain with the party, while I made my way alone through the gardens.

All lovers of the Iris have heard of M. Denis, but all of you may not know that he is an amateur, and that he lives in the little town of Balaruc les Baines, a suburb of Cette, which is the most southern seaport on the Mediterranean coast of France. M. Denis' invitation was for May first, but the very best I could do was to reach Cette about midnight of May third. Each of you have seen foreigners helplessly trying to find their way around in our own country, and I do not know with what kind of feelings you have watched them, but after my experience in arriving at a strange town, among people speaking a strange language, in a dark railroad station, at midnight, I know that my heart should prompt me to help the foreigners. I willingly draw the veil of silence over my experiences that night, and will only tell you that eventually and very unceremoniously I found a place to sleep.

M. Denis happened to be out of town the following morning, as he is a business man, the managing director of two very large manufacturing plants which ship their products to distant parts of the world. When he returned in the early afternoon, he sent his automobile to my hotel, and he gave me a most hearty welcome when I arrived at his office.

We went immediately to his garden and although his command of English exactly equals my command of French, yet I am sure we both enjoyed the time, for words are not needed to express the language of appreciation. Face, eyes and hands can speak as plainly as words, and I have sometimes thought they are more truthful. And when the garden visit was finished and he invited me into his home, and brought out a bottle of 1868 wine, I did not think it was necessary, or even appropriate, to tell him that the United States was a dry country and she expected her citizens to remember the fact when traveling abroad. He is a very generous man, for he freely offers to his visitors roots of his finest varieties, but with ten or twelve weeks' travel ahead of me, I could not avail myself of his generous offer.

But what did I see? That I know is your question for I am sure every Iris enthusiast would prize the memory of such a visit. As an American, I was delighted when at the very entrance to his garden he showed me the largest ciump of LENT A. WILLIAMSON I had ever seen, with the remark, "very good Iris". I am sure my friend Williamson of Bluffton, Indiana, would thoroughly have enjoyed the remarks of all the French and English growers, whenever his variety was mentioned, and I hope that this is the first news that he gets of the fact that LENT A. WILLIAMSON was one of the four outstanding varieties at the big Chelsea show in London. But I must not forget that it is M. Denis' garden that you want to know about, and I will try to keep within its walls until I have finished, and when I say "walls" I mean "walls", for every French garden I visited was enclosed with very strong walls usually eight to twelve feet high. These walls give a feeling of seclusion and rest not found in our more open American gardens, and I believe the feeling of seclusion is more sought after in Europe than in America.

M. Denis has two hobbies, Orchids and Irises, and I understand he is as famous for his Orchids as he is for his Irises. I do not know which of his Irises he considers his best, but my favorite is MLE. SCHWARTZ, a light blue Iris with a pink sheen over it. Now I know it is said there are no blue Irises and also no Irises have real pink in them, and I will not attempt to deny either of these statements, yet MLE. SCHWARTZ does make me think "delicate light blue" and "dainty pink". I confess the color is very elusive and the blue and pink may not be real, but the effect is very, very beautiful. The bloom is of good form and size and of excellent substance and the plant strong and well branched. In G. P. Baker's Garden in Bexley, Kent, England, I saw it growing nearly five feet tall. In the great Paris Show in June, this variety, as exhibited by Maron & Sons, was awarded a Certificate of Merit, and if M. Denis had not originated another Iris, he would still be a famous man. I am sure it is one of the best ten Irises in the world, and I believe it is one of the best five, and if someone would tell me that he considered it the very best Iris in the world I would not feel it my duty to tell him that he was wrong.

Denis' latest introduction, LOUIS BELL, a cross between

KOCHII and MME. GAUDICHAU, is so dark that even the top surface of the beard is black. I believe there are only seven rhizomes of it in existence yet, but to me it seems to offer great promise. Each year I expect to write to M. Denis and ask for a report on LOUIS BELL, and as soon as it is on the market I will purchase it for my garden.

I cannot take your time to tell you of all the Denis seedlings, but here are some that I like very much: MADAME CHOBOUT, which pleases me for exactly the same reason that MARY GARDEN pleases me; TROOST, a bloom with most pleasing standards which some people insist are pink; HAUTEFEUILLE, a very tall, stately red-purple which I have admired for two seasons; DEUIL DE VALERY MAYET, which, as exhibited in the Paris Show, seemed to me a good approach to red; EDITH CAVEL, or MISS CAVEL as the name is sometimes given, is a medium tall, pure white, which seems much better in England than in Southern France. This is not by any means a complete list of the Denis varieties, but as the others bloom in my own garden from year to year, I will hope to find the equal of a MME. SCHWARTZ or a LOUIS BELL.

M. Denis has not only produced varieties by ordinary crosses, but he has also worked with different species, crossing them in unusual ways, as for instance LUTESCENS AUREA with SUSIANA, and this cross he calls ZWANENBURG. It is a prolific, medium bright variety, blooming with the Intermediates and it has unusual coloring, in which tan and white predominate.

I could see that M. Denis is living an unusually happy life with his flowers, and I believe every man whose hobby brings him into a contact with Nature will not only enjoy added years to his life, but will also radiate a spirit of harmony which will draw friendship to him. I will look forward to a visit from M. Denis in my Garden, so that I may again accept an invitation to the "walled garden" of Balaruc les Bains.

In succeeding issues of these Garden Notes I expect to tell of my visits with Millet, Cayeaux, Dessert, Lemoine, Maron, Vilmorin, Bliss, Hort, Yeld, Dykes, Perry, Wallace, Barr, Kelway, Bunyard, Murrell, Baker, and other Iris and Peony enthusiasts.

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